
SIGNIFICANT CARE

Artist Rashid Johnson (b. 1977, Chicago, IL) works across media, including painting, sculpture, video, performance and installation, to pay homage to African American intellectual and creative history while also referencing art history. *Antoine's Organ* (2016), his installation in "**Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America**," consists of a grid of: shelves with plants, grow lights, books, shea butter (extracted from African Shea tree nuts and used as a moisturizer or salve), screens with his videos, rugs, and a piano in the center. The large-scale installation sits in the center of a gallery. Visitors can walk around to read the book titles, view the plants, videos, and other objects, and hear music. While the installation often plays recorded music, on Saturdays, pianist Antoine Baldwin brings the piano and installation to life. The installation acts as a living memorial of African American life:

"...It's titled *Antoine's Organ*, which is the suggestion of a piano or something that makes sound that is also the suggestion of something in the body, whether it's a heart or lungs. There's an opportunity for an emotional engagement with a sculpture like this as a result of experiencing music and a visual kind of stimulus simultaneously.... A lot of the objects in the work are things that I've employed in the past. There are several books, different plants, shea butter. There's films that I made and they all kind of are components of things that... are signifiers of my own practice, things that I'm invested in or interested in.... It functions in a lot of ways as a delivery system, meaning that it has endless number of signifiers and reference points inside of it..."

– **Rashid Johnson, Antoine's Organ, Unlimited, Art Basel 2018**

To learn more about Johnson's *Antoine's Organ* installation and interest in African American history, you can **watch** a time-lapse video of a similar installation being assembled, or **listen** to one of Johnson's artist talks.

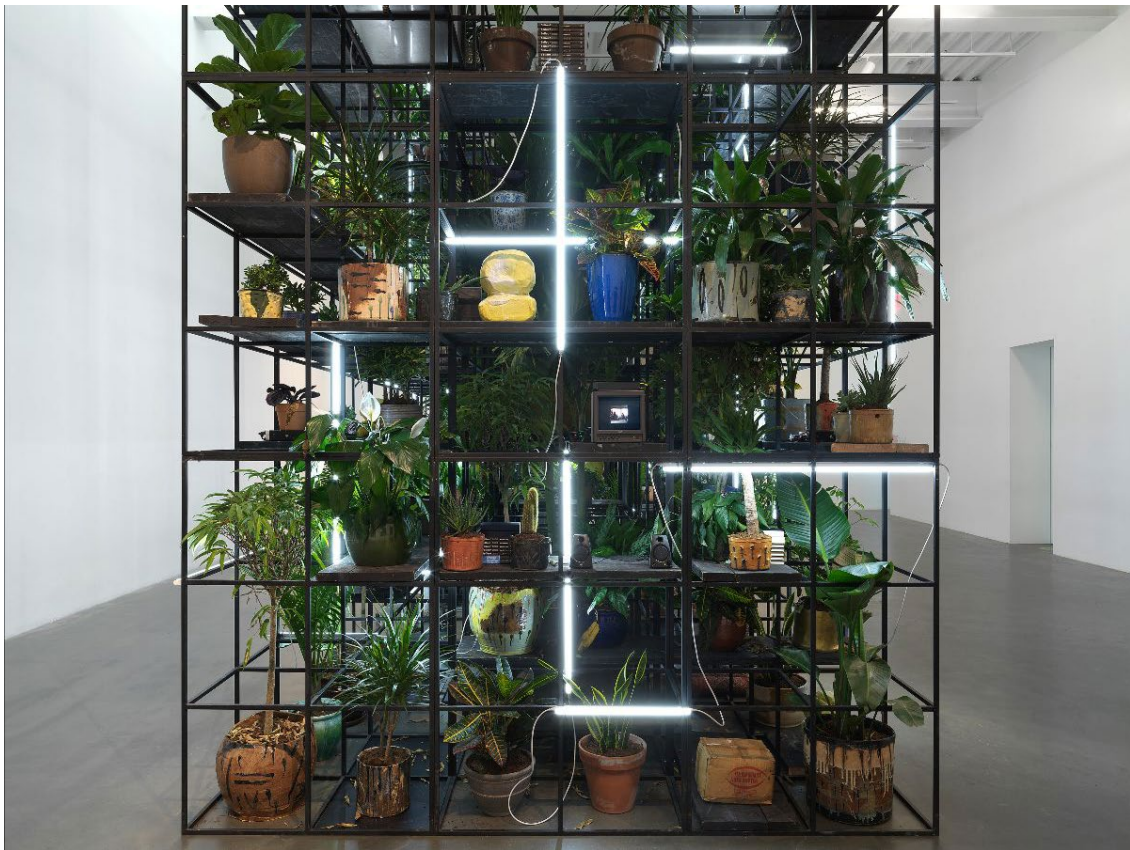
KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

- **installation:** a collection of objects, which can be handmade by the artist, found and assembled, or a combination of artist-made and pre-existing, that works together to transform a space
- **signifier:** a sound, image, printed word, or object that describes or represents an underlying meaning, history, experience, or concept.

Signifiers in Johnson's installation include shea butter, which represents care or self-care; houseplants, which represent caring for the environment and interior space of the home; and books representing African American history and culture.

- **living memorial:** (in the context of Rashid Johnson's installation), live plants and other objects that honor, pay tribute to, and affirm African American culture, art, and history through the artist's point of view





START WITH ART: RASHID JOHNSON

- What objects do you notice in this installation?
- How would you compare the plants in relation to the grid? Consider size, shape, texture, color, and pattern. Are the plants contained within the grid, and/or do the plants extend above or beyond the grid?
- How do you think it would feel to walk around this installation?
- What kind of care does this art need?
- There are small televisions playing different videos and piano music. What do you think the installation sounds like? What songs do you imagine played on the piano?
- How might Johnson's **living memorial** in the form of a large-scale **installation** inspire us?

LOOK AROUND

- Can you think of a special experience or a person you would like to honor or recognize through an installation of care or memorial?
- Is there music that reminds you of that person, experience, or event?
- Alternatively, do you and/or your family have activities or rituals of care that you would like to honor? Rituals might be reading before bed, singing, movie nights, cooking, eating meals together, or playing sports or games.
- The artist includes objects that represent care and his personal, family, and cultural history. What kind of objects do you have that might represent family, personal, or cultural care and rituals? (This might

include books, games, sports equipment, labels, gifts, mementos, plants, or packaging from food, and photographs of activities.)

MAKE ART

Let's create a living memorial and installation of books, photographs, objects and music signifying an event, experience, or person.

Materials

- Toys, mementos, books, photographs, and other objects reminiscent of a special person, place or event
- If you're representing a family or personal ritual, objects might include games, books, food labels, cookware
- A dedicated space to organize your objects into an installation (this might include a shelf or shelves, or an area of your room, including the floor or a tabletop)
- Music that reminds you of the person, event, or experience of the ritual, and a device for playing music
- Optional: live music you sing or play on an instrument
- Optional: live plants or cut flowers from inside the home or a garden. Alternatively, fallen leaves, flowers, acorns or other natural items you find outside can be used.

Making

- Once you've identified an event, person, experience, or personal or family ritual to honor, begin looking for related objects.
- Identify an area where you can keep the objects together for at least a few days.
- Arrange your objects to help tell the story of the person, experience, or event.
- Find music to signify the person, experience or event, and pick a time of day when you can sing or play music as long as the objects are displayed together.
- Invite friends or family to visit the display and ask them how they feel when they view it. Does it trigger any memories?

REFLECTION

- How did you decide how to arrange your objects?
- How did the story you wanted to tell about the person, experience, or event compare with viewers' impressions of your installation?
- If you decided to make music, how did it feel to interact with the visual installation through music? Did it change your impression of the overall installation? Did music or playing music help trigger additional thoughts and memories?
- Consider recording yourself playing music in or near the installation to

share with a larger number of friends and relatives. How do you think it will feel to share the artwork with more people? How might their impressions of the installation influence your own thoughts and feelings about it?

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MUSEUM

IMAGES: "Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America," 2021. Exhibition view: New Mu-seum, New York. Photo: Dario Lasagni (featuring *Antoine's Organ* (2016) by Rashid Johnson)

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